

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Water & Power

Witness Statement

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER
The Honorable John Doolittle, Chairman
April 6, 2000**

**TESTIMONY OF KEITH HANSEN
Chairman, Colusa Basin Drainage District, California**

**HR 1113
COLUSA BASIN WATERSHED INTEGRATED RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Keith Hansen. I am a farmer and Chairman of the Board of the Colusa Basin Drainage District. I also serve as a Glenn County Supervisor, a position that I have held for nearly 20 years. I want to thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing. The District directors also thank Congressman Ose for choosing this as his first bill, and for being such a strong supporter of finding a flooding solution that integrates damage-reduction measures with ecosystem restoration and environmental enhancement.

In addition, I thank the Resources Committee for supporting legislation identical to H.R. 1113 in the 105th Congress. As you may recall, the House and Senate both approved the Colusa Basin Watershed Integrated Resources Management Act as part of an omnibus bill, which died because of problems unrelated to the Colusa Basin program.

I would like to give you some background and tell you of the urgent need for passage of H.R. 1113 by the 106th Congress.

The million-acre Colusa Basin watershed covers three counties, Glenn, Colusa and Northern Yolo in California's upper Sacramento Valley along the Sacramento River. Thirty-two ephemeral (seasonal) streams empty into the 75-mile-long Colusa Basin Drain, which empties into the Sacramento River or the Yolo Bypass during flood events. The Basin is not only an important agricultural area served by the Bureau of Reclamation, but it is also a rich wildlife area encompassing three national wildlife refuges.

Over the decades, devastating floods have repeatedly struck the Colusa Basin resulting in costly damages to public and private property and loss of life. In 1995 and again in 1998 the three counties suffered an estimated \$100 million in damages, with public infrastructure damages accounting for 65 percent of the loss.

The primary causes of the flooding are the topography of the Basin, which involves a large number of ephemeral streams discharging into the Drain, and the human activities. Over the past century and a half, these activities have destroyed or degraded the ability of the land to act like a "sponge" and absorb precipitation, recharge groundwater supplies, limit erosion, and provide water for wildlife habitat.

The District, working with the Bureau of Reclamation, has developed the Colusa Basin Integrated Resource Management Program to address both the peak flooding problems associated with topography and the lower-intensity flooding problems associated with human activity. The program also is designed to restore some of the basin's natural ability to control flooding and provide water and habitat for wildlife.

The Bureau of Reclamation was chosen as a partner for a number of reasons. The Bureau delivers water from the Central Valley Project to the 20 agricultural irrigation districts, as well as three national wildlife refuges, located in the 650,000-acre Colusa Basin Drainage District, and therefore has a real presence and interest in the Basin. Reclamation is interested in the preservation and enhancement of habitat and wetlands critical to Bay-Delta restoration, as well as finding new water sources for wildlife and habitat, as stated in its Strategic Plan for 2000-2005.

This is a long-term program to address issues in the Basin. The Plan would be implemented on a willing landowner basis over the next 20- to 25-year period.

The program plan includes:

Small impoundments on ephemeral (seasonal) streams to reduce flood flows. Eight earthen detention reservoirs are planned that will be operated to provide a water supply for environmental purposes as well as flood management.

Restoration of important ecological processes that help control flooding. A series of interrelated conservation measures are designed to restore the ecosystem and by doing so increase groundwater recharge, reduce siltation and erosion and increase habitat. The District is already working with the local Resource Conservation Districts on a number of conservation measures through a CalFed program, as well as participating in the USDA EQIP (Environmental Quality Improvement Program) program on similar measures. These elements will be expanded through our program.

- Creation of up to 10,000 acres of wetlands and environmental enhancements. The first phase goal is 3,000 acres.
- 100-year protection on tributaries where facilities are located.
- Reduction of flooding in the Basin
- Creation of an environmental water supply. Reservoirs will be operated to provide a water supply for environmental purposes.
- A priority on public safety. Through reducing flooding of homes, reducing infrastructure damage to sewer systems, bridges and railroads; reducing road and highway closures; and keeping escape routes open for emergency vehicles, the plan will provide better protection to citizens.

The District, working with landowners, several federal, state, local agencies and private organizations has developed a cutting-edge program. The draft programmatic EIS is essentially completed on the million-acre watershed and a 90-day public comment period will begin soon. The final EIS and record of decision by Reclamation are expected in October.

It is anticipated that the project will be financed by District landowners and through partnerships with the Bureau of Reclamation, the State of California, Cal-Fed and other state, federal and local agencies and organizations. For example, the District has been awarded \$8.9 million through a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant, contingent upon finding other funding partners and completing the environmental documentation.

The District has worked as a partner with the Bureau to develop this innovative plan, which can serve as a model for future projects nationally. The goals of this program fit well with Reclamation's Strategic Plan. H.R.1113 will allow the Bureau and the District to implement the Colusa Basin Integrate Resources Management Program, and we ask for your support of the legislation

Thank you. It has been a privilege to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions. The District Manager, Gaye Lopez, also is here to answer questions.

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